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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000095

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SUBJECT: MDC INSIDER ON INTRA-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

11. (C) MDC MP Tendai Biti, who has been negotiating with Welshman Ncube,s faction on behalf of MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai, told the Ambassador January 19 that he had

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prepared a document that would lead to an amicable MDC &divorce.⁸ The Harare East MP said he had also prepared a draft reconciliation agreement and with MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai,s blessing had presented both documents to Ncube

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for consideration. On January 27, Biti told the Ambassador he had yet to hear from Ncube and had concluded that an early reconciliation was unlikely and that an amicable divorce might also be on hold. He attributed the delay to the growing pressures on the Ncube faction, including choosing a president. Biti said he still believed that reconciliation would occur in the long run and that he was rewriting the party,s constitution to ease that process. End Summary.

Divorce) MDC Style

12. (C) In a brief meeting with the Ambassador on January 19, Biti said he and Ncube, both lawyers, had been set to argue opposite sides of a court case earlier that week. When the judge failed to show, the two negotiated a resolution of the court case directly. They then turned to the MDC,s intra-party wrangling, agreeing that it was past time to agree on an amicable &divorce.⁸ Biti said he and Ncube agreed on five elements: Tsvangirai,s faction would keep the MDC name; both sides would keep whatever party assets they currently controlled; cash on hand, including in a bank in

the U.K., would be divided evenly; the party headquarters in Harare would go to Tsvangirai, in Bulawayo to Ncube,s faction; and finally, Tsvangirai,s group would not seek by-elections to oust MPs supporting Ncube.

Door Number Two -- Reconciliation

13. (C) Biti said that in the process of preparing the &divorce8 settlement, he had started thinking about the outlines of a possible reconciliation. Both factions still agreed that the ZANU-PF government was the real enemy and both were aware that their feud had cost the party support. He had drawn up a second document, which contained the elements of a potential reconciliation: Tsvangiari,s kitchen cabinet would be removed -- which Biti said would likely happen in any event; the top four leadership positions would remain unchanged and uncontested (i.e. Gift ChimaniKire would be out but Ncube would remain as Secretary General); and both factions would agree on a new constitution that would acknowledge the president as party leader but that would vest most authority in the National Council.

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Update: No Progress, Ncube Faction Under Duress
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14. (C) Biti said that with Tsvangirai,s blessing he had presented both documents to Ncube the week of January 16. According to Biti, Tsvangirai was hoping for an early reconciliation, despite the difficulties he would have reconciling with Ncube. In that regard, Biti noted the reports that Ncube had received a government-allocated farm had deeply troubled Tsvangirai and other MDC leaders. Biti added that both documents were a &good deal8 for the Ncube

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faction. Biti said Ncube had promised to respond by the end of the following week and Biti told the Ambassador that he would brief us on the outcome immediately thereafter.

15. (C) In a subsequent meeting on January 27, Biti told the Ambassador that Ncube had yet to respond to either document. He interpreted the delay as a sign that an early reconciliation was unlikely. The formal &divorce8 might also not occur until after the two faction,s respective congresses. Biti said part of the delay was likely the result of the growing pressures on the Ncube faction. Biti said the Ncube faction was splintering over the question of who would be &party8 president. MDC Vice President Gibson Sibanda and Chimaikire had both declared their interest. Biti said he had actually been approached on behalf of the faction by Isaac Maposa, the director of the Zimbabwe Institute, the MDC,s think-tank in South Africa and offered the faction,s presidency, which he had declined.

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New Constitution Long-Term Basis for Reconciliation
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16. (C) Biti said a longer-term reconciliation was still possible. Biti said that he had been tasked with drafting the new party constitution prior to the Tsvangirai-led party congress and was working to create a document that could form the foundation of an eventual reconciliation, possibly in the run-up to the next national elections. Biti said the starting point for his draft was an acknowledgement that the old constitution needed to be updated to account from the party,s growth, including especially defining the role of MPs, mayors, and other elected officials.

17. (C) Biti said the new constitution also needed to help resolve the disputes that led to the party,s unraveling by making the MDC more internally democratic. As he had said at our earlier meeting, this involved giving the National

Council greater authority while acknowledging the president as head of the party. However, his draft also expanded the "management8 committee, the highest regular structure in the party,s executive, from the current &top six8 to 11 party leaders. Biti said he was preparing to send the document to the provincial structures for review and expected it to be adopted at the mainstream Tsvangirai faction,s party congress.

Comment

¶8. (C) A well-respected business lawyer who has been privately critical of both Tsvangirai and Ncube in the past, Biti has emerged as a central figure in the MDC endgame. He has sided with Tsvangirai but has the trust and respect of the Ncube faction. Perhaps more importantly, along with Roy Bennett, David Coltart, and others he is part of a group of MDC leaders that are disappointed with both sides and are pushing to create a more democratic and more vigorous opposition party that can eventually reunify and challenge for power.

¶9. (C) The offer to Biti to become president of the Ncube faction offers an insight into a central question that has the power to seriously undermine the faction,s solidarity) it,s presidency. The Sibanda-Chimaikire feud is out in the open. However, the fact that Ncube favors neither is not. As the senior official Sibanda believes he should be president. However, he is an Ndebele (as is Ncube) and conventional wisdom is that only a member of the majority Shona ethnicity can lead a national party) hence Chimanikire,s challenge. However, Chimanikire is poorly

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regarded by one and all and we have heard rumors for some time that Ncube is looking for an &acceptable8 Shona to assume the presidency.

¶10. (C) Biti certainly would have fit the bill but is firmly on Tsvangirai,s side as is businessman Strive Masiyiwa who is also rumored to have been offered the faction,s presidency. It is a measure of the faction,s weakness that a month before its congress it is looking to Tsvangiari,s supporters for a leader. University of Zimbabwe professor and former mediator Brian Raftopolous told us late year Tsvangirai needed a credible Ndebele second while Ncube

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needed a prominent Shona front man. Raftopolous predicted Tsvangirai would have the easier time and with press accounts

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naming Bulawayo MP Thokozani Khupe as a possible vice president, he appears to have been correct.
DELL